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(54) **REMOTE WINCH CLUTCH SYSTEM**

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**B66D 1/56** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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See application file for complete search history.

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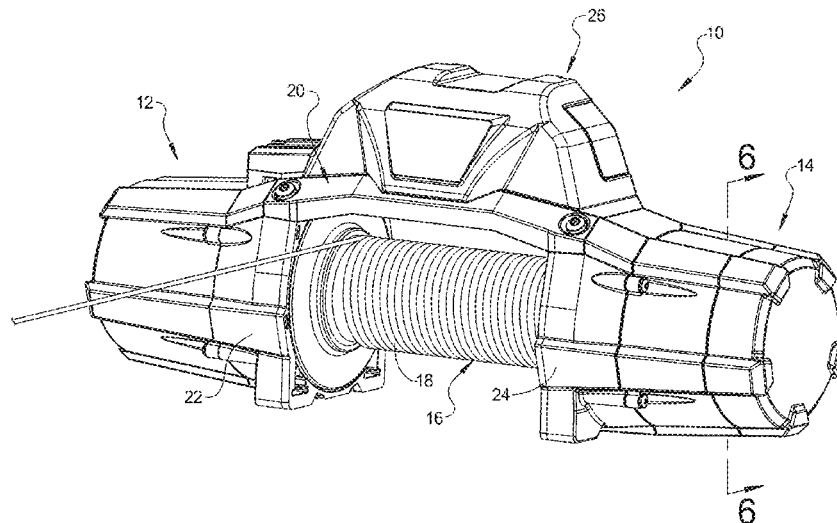
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#### ABSTRACT

A winch is provided including a rotatable drum and a gear train drivably connecting a motor to the rotatable drum. The gear train includes a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow the rotatable drum to free spool. A clutch actuator is provided for disengaging the clutch and the clutch includes a pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and the clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of the pivoting pawl.

**22 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets**



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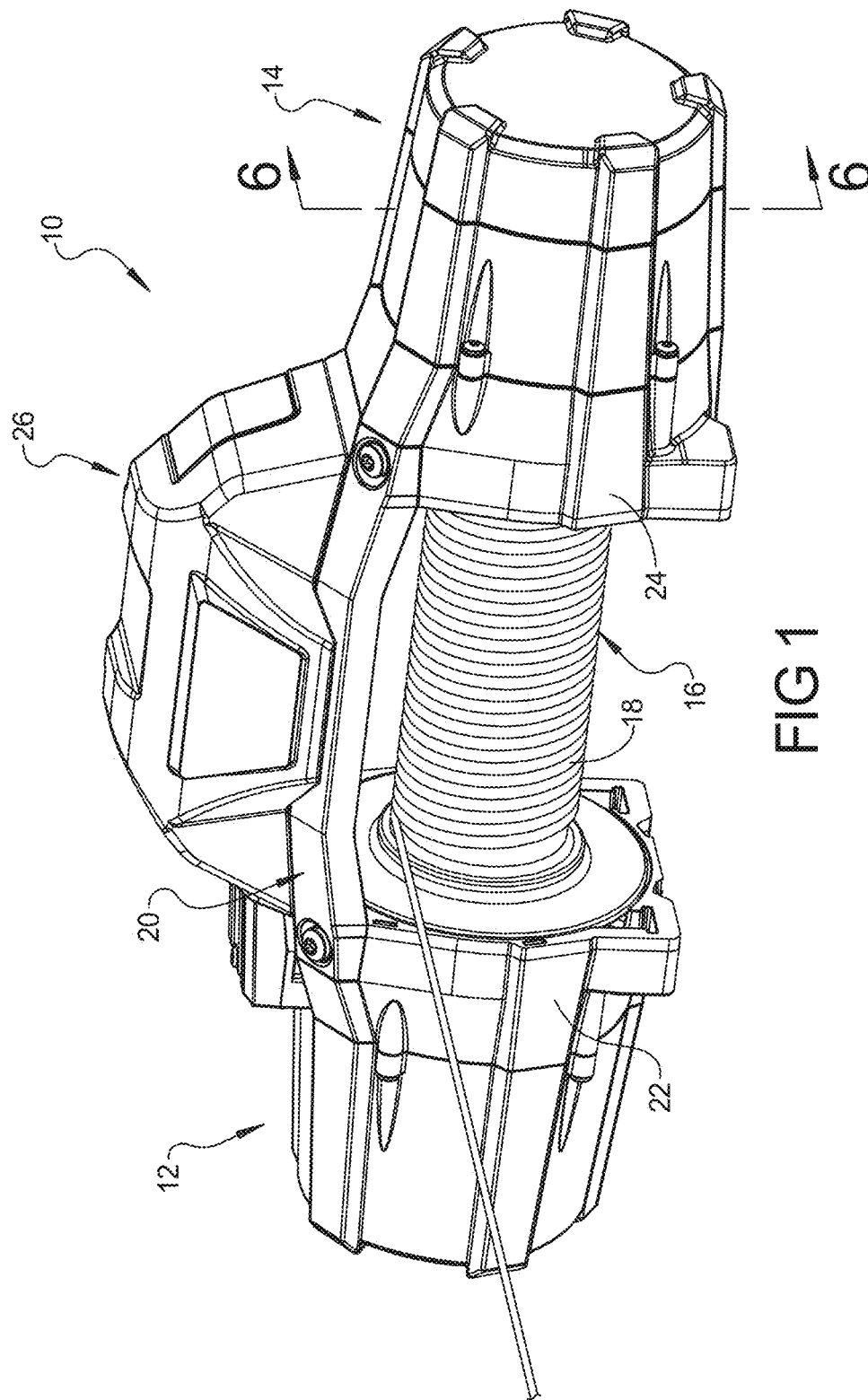
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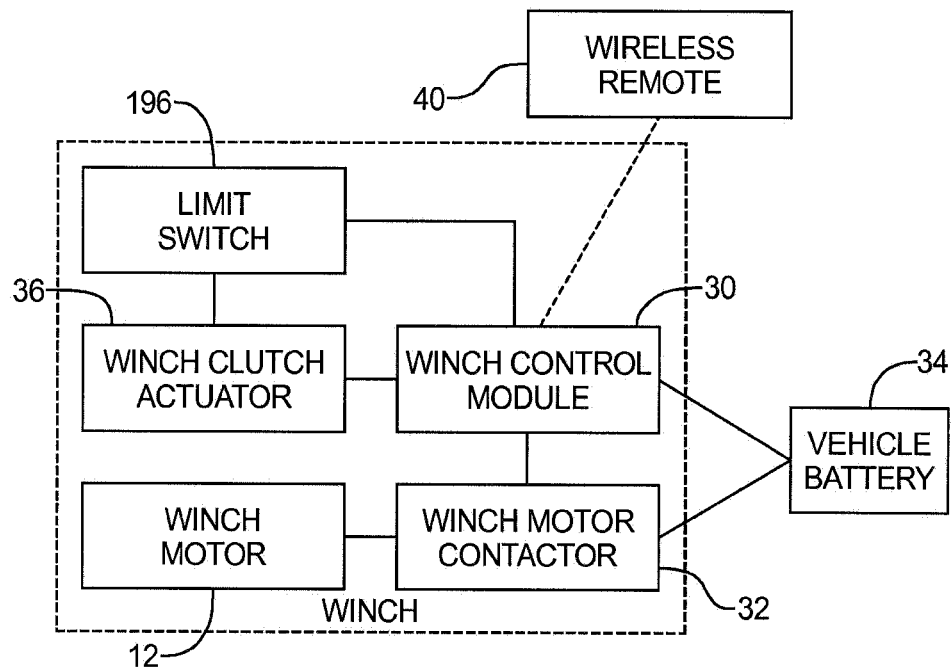


FIG 2

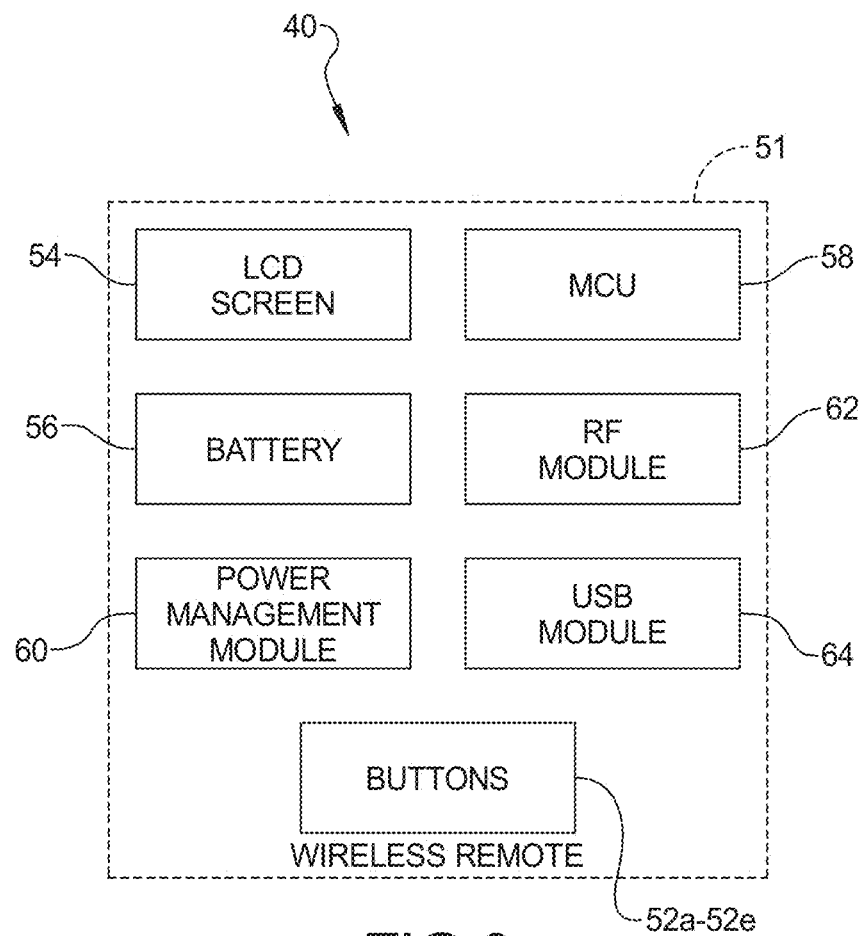


FIG 3

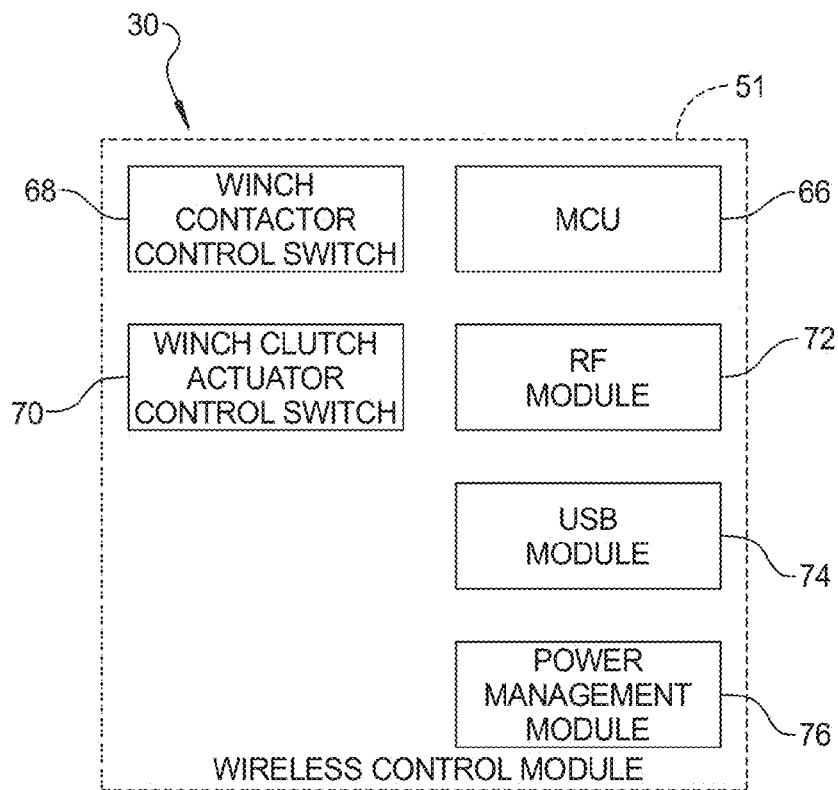


FIG 4

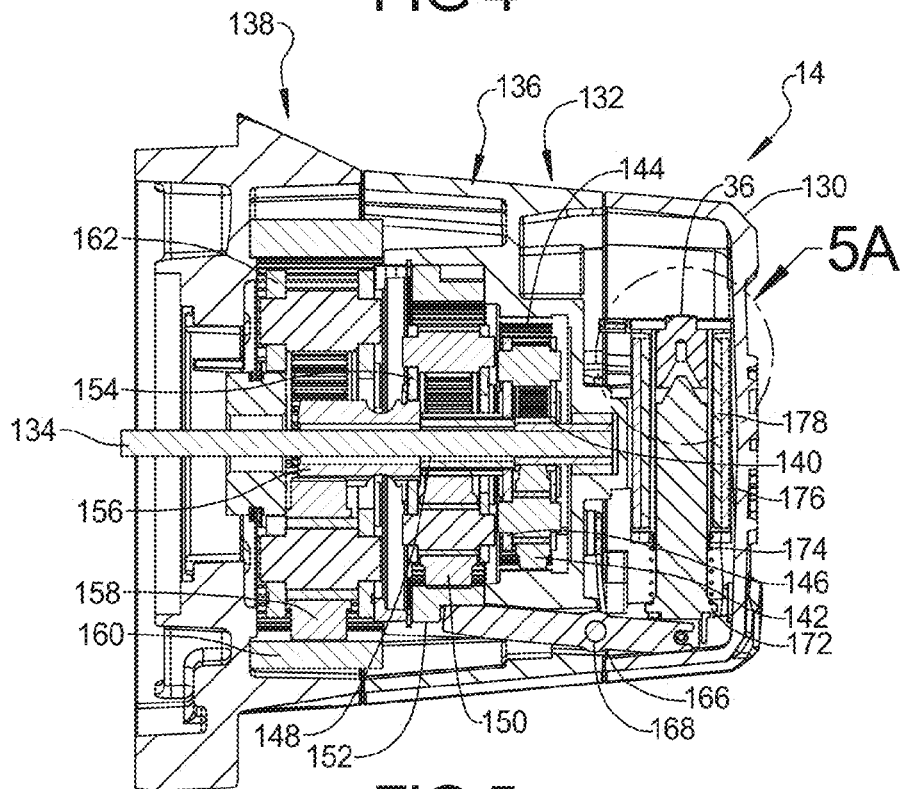


FIG 5

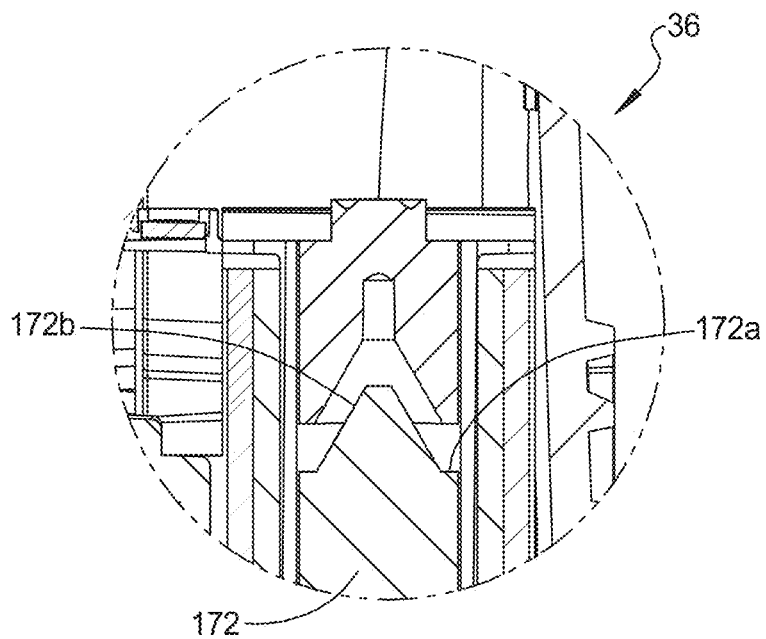


FIG 5A

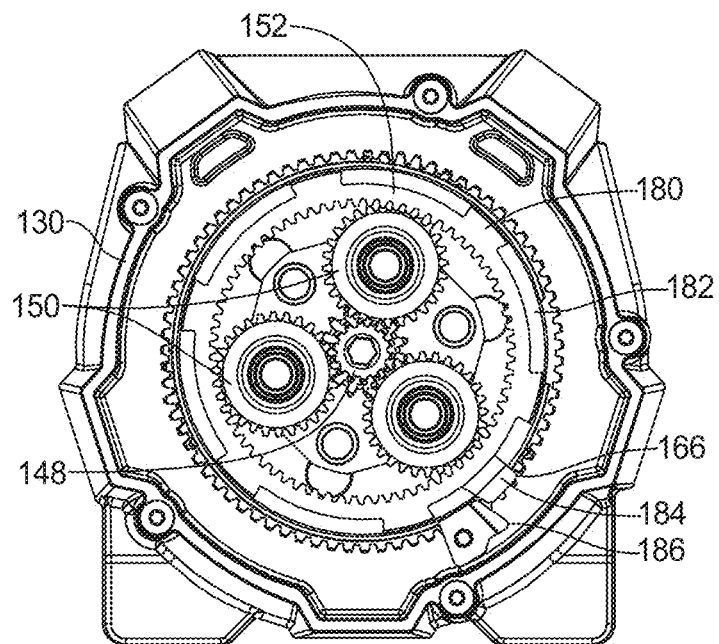


FIG 6

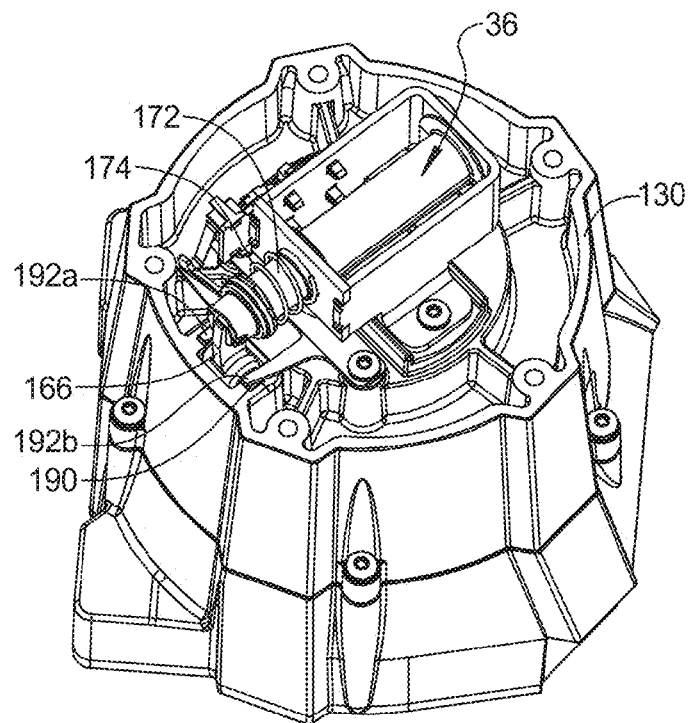


FIG 7

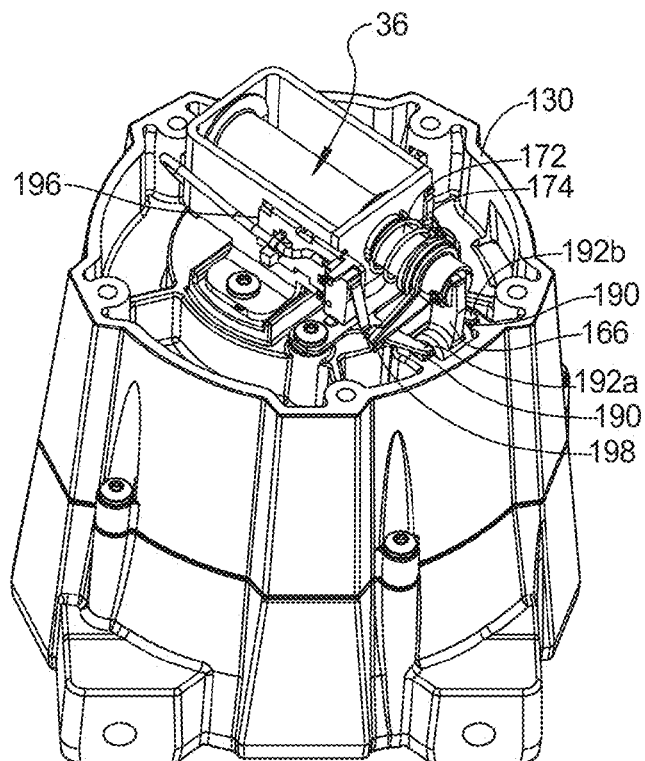


FIG 8



## REMOTE WINCH CLUTCH SYSTEM

## FIELD

The present disclosure relates to winches and more particularly, to a remote controlled clutch system for a winch.

## BACKGROUND

This section provides background information related to the present disclosure which is not necessarily prior art.

Winches are commonly used for off-road vehicles and in farm, ranch, and other industrial applications where an operator is using the rope or cable to connect to various structures. In order to quickly spool-out the rope or cable from a winch, winches are commonly provided with a free-spool operation mode which is typically operated by a manual shift lever on the winch gear case that disengages a clutch device from a component of the planetary gear system of the winch. Often times, the winch cable is connected to the various structures at a distance from the winch and the operator is required to walk back and forth to the winch for disengaging and re-engaging the clutch. Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a remote actuated clutch for a winch to allow the operator to disengage and re-engage the winch clutch from a remote location.

## SUMMARY

This section provides a general summary of the disclosure, and is not a comprehensive disclosure of its full scope or all of its features.

According to an aspect of the present disclosure, a winch is provided including a rotatable drum and a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to the rotatable drum. The gear train includes a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow the rotatable drum to free spool. A clutch actuator is provided for disengaging the clutch and the clutch includes a pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and the clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of the pivoting pawl.

According to a further aspect of the present disclosure, the electro-magnetic solenoid includes a first coil and a second coil, the first coil being operated along with the second coil to retract the plunger and the plunger being held in the retracted position by only the first coil.

According to another aspect, a limit switch is provided that is tripped by one of the plunger and the pivoting pawl when the plunger and pivoting pawl are in a disengaged position. The limit switch is in communication with a controller to indicate that the clutch is in a disengaged position to allow the rotatable drum to free spool.

According to a still further aspect of the present disclosure, the pivoting pawl includes a pawl head at the first end with an angled face. The pivoting pawl is pivoted about a pivot pin that is held in a pair of pockets by a spring member that deflects when the rotatable drum is under load and the pivoting pawl is engaged with the clutch dog, allowing the pivoting pawl to move laterally. A pawl stop is positioned with a small gap to the pawl head. When the pawl head moves laterally against the spring member, the gap is closed and the pawl head rests against the pawl stop. The pawl stop and the pawl head have slightly angled opposing faces which impact a radial force on the pivoting pawl to hold it in the engaged position.

Further areas of applicability will become apparent from the description provided herein. The description and specific

examples in this summary are intended for purposes of illustration only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

## DRAWINGS

The drawings described herein are for illustrative purposes only of selected embodiments and not all possible implementations, and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a winch according to the principles of the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram of the controls of the winch according to the principles of present disclosure;

FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram of the components of the remote control unit;

FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram of the components of the winch control module according to the principles of the present disclosure;

FIG. 5 is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the gear reduction unit 14;

FIG. 5A is a detailed cross-sectional view of a stepped end of the plunger of the clutch actuator shown in FIG. 5;

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view taken along line 6-6 of FIG. 1;

FIG. 7 is a first end perspective view of the gear reduction unit with the end cover removed showing the clutch actuator; and

FIG. 8 is a perspective view similar to FIG. 7 taken from a different angle of the clutch actuator.

Corresponding reference numerals indicate corresponding parts throughout the several views of the drawings.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Example embodiments will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Example embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough, and will fully convey the scope to those who are skilled in the art. Numerous specific details are set forth such as examples of specific components, devices, and methods, to provide a thorough understanding of embodiments of the present disclosure. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that specific details need not be employed, that example embodiments may be embodied in many different forms and that neither should be construed to limit the scope of the disclosure. In some example embodiments, well-known processes, well-known device structures, and well-known technologies are not described in detail.

The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular example embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting. As used herein, the singular forms "a," "an," and "the" may be intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. The terms "comprises," "comprising," "including," and "having," are inclusive and therefore specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof. The method steps, processes, and operations described herein are not to be construed as necessarily requiring their performance in the particular order discussed or illustrated, unless specifically identified as an order of performance. It is also to be understood that additional or alternative steps may be employed.

When an element or layer is referred to as being "on," "engaged to," "connected to," or "coupled to" another ele-

ment or layer, it may be directly on, engaged, connected or coupled to the other element or layer, or intervening elements or layers may be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being “directly on,” “directly engaged to,” “directly connected to,” or “directly coupled to” another element or layer, there may be no intervening elements or layers present. Other words used to describe the relationship between elements should be interpreted in a like fashion (e.g., “between” versus “directly between,” “adjacent” versus “directly adjacent,” etc.). As used herein, the term “and/or” includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items.

Although the terms first, second, third, etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections, these elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections should not be limited by these terms. These terms may be only used to distinguish one element, component, region, layer or section from another region, layer or section. Terms such as “first,” “second,” and other numerical terms when used herein do not imply a sequence or order unless clearly indicated by the context. Thus, a first element, component, region, layer or section discussed below could be termed a second element, component, region, layer or section without departing from the teachings of the example embodiments.

Spatially relative terms, such as “inner,” “outer,” “beneath,” “below,” “lower,” “above,” “upper,” and the like, may be used herein for ease of description to describe one element or feature’s relationship to another element(s) or feature(s) as illustrated in the figures. Spatially relative terms may be intended to encompass different orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the orientation depicted in the figures. For example, if the device in the figures is turned over, elements described as “below” or “beneath” other elements or features would then be oriented “above” the other elements or features. Thus, the example term “below” can encompass both an orientation of above and below. The device may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations) and the spatially relative descriptors used herein interpreted accordingly.

With reference to FIG. 1, a winch 10 according to the principles of the present disclosure will now be described. The winch 10 includes a motor assembly 12 drivingly connected to a gear reduction unit 14 which provides driving torque to a rotatable drum 16. A cable 18 can be wound onto, or off from, the rotatable drum 16 to provide various pulling operations. A tie plate 20 can be disposed for connection between a first drum support 22 of the motor assembly 12 and a second drum support 24 of the gear reduction unit 14. A control unit 26 can be removably mounted to the tie plate 20. The first drum support 22 and the second drum support 24 provide a bearing support structure for rotatably supporting the rotatable drum 16.

With reference to FIG. 2, the control unit 26 of the winch 10 includes a winch control module 30 and a winch motor contactor 32 which are each connected to a vehicle battery 34. The winch control module 30 provides control signals to the winch motor contactor 32 which can supply current from the vehicle battery 34 to the winch motor 12. The winch control module 30 also can control a winch clutch actuator 36 that can be in the form of an electronic solenoid described in greater detail herein.

A wireless remote 40 can be provided for providing control signals to the winch control module 30 and for receiving feedback signals from the winch control module 30 regarding an operational status of the winch. The communication between the winch control module 30 and the wireless remote

40 can be performed by a pairing process that provides a two-way RF mesh network connection using a secured and encrypted wireless communication protocol.

The wireless remote 40 is a handheld device for controlling the winch and accessory functions. A schematic diagram of an exemplary handheld wireless remote device 40 is shown in FIG. 3. With reference to FIG. 3, the remote handheld device has a housing 51 with several buttons 52a-52e for control input and an LCD screen 54 for system feedback. The wireless remote 40 also includes a rechargeable battery 56, a microcontroller unit (MCU) 58, a power management module 60, an RF module 62, and a USB module 64. The buttons 52a-52e of the wireless remote 40 are arranged to accomplish the desired functions of the winch 10. The winch 10 will be controlled by two dedicated buttons 52a, 52b that control the power-in and power-out states of the winch which allow the cable to be pulled in or out, respectively. An additional button 52c is provided to control the winch clutch actuator and a fourth button 52d is provided to control the accessories. A fifth button 52e is provided to select the desired control mode and to access programmable functions.

The LCD screen 54 can provide visual feedback to the user. The feedback will include the status of control inputs such as winch power-in or power-out. Feedback may also include information such as vehicle battery voltage, winch motor current draw, winch motor temperature, winch load, and winch clutch position.

The winch control module 30 resides within the control unit 26 which can be on or near the winch 10. The winch control module 30 first functions to distribute power from the vehicle battery 34 to the winch motor 12 and clutch actuator. A second winch control module function is to establish a node in the two-way RF communication network with the wireless remote 40. As such, the winch control module 30 communicates with the wireless remote 40 to send and receive information. Information sent by the winch control module 30 may include winch and clutch operational status information. The information that is received by the winch control module 30 may be winch and clutch operational commands that are sent from the wireless remote 40.

A third winch control module function is to switch on or off the winch 10 and clutch actuator solenoid 36 electrical power according to the input commands received from the wireless remote 40 and the control programming. The control programming resides within a micro control unit 66 of the winch control module 30.

The winch control module 30, as illustrated in FIG. 4, can include the microcontroller unit 66 that contains the programmable data for controlling the operation of the winch 10 and clutch actuator 36. A winch contactor control switch 68 is provided for communication with the winch motor contactor 32. A winch clutch actuator control switch 70 is provided for communication with the winch clutch actuator 36. An RF module 72 can be provided for providing two-way RF communication between the winch control module 30 and the wireless remote 40. The winch control module 30 can also include a USB module 74 to allow the winch control module 30 to be connected to a computer or programming module for programming the MCU 66. A power management module 76 can be provided for managing the distribution of power from the vehicle battery to the winch 10.

With reference to FIG. 5, the gear reduction unit 14 includes a housing 130 that is mounted to the second drum support 24. A first stage planetary gear set 132 is driven by a drive shaft 134 and delivers drive torque to a second stage planetary gear set 136. The second stage planetary gear set

5

136 provides torque to a third stage planetary gear set 138 which provides torque to the rotatable drum 16.

The first stage planetary gear set 132 includes a sun gear 140 that is drivingly connected to the drive shaft 134 and provides driving torque to a plurality of planetary gears 142 which are meshingly engaged with a ring gear 144 that is fixed within the housing 130. A planetary carrier 146 supports the planetary gears 142 and provides driving torque to a second sun gear 148 of the second stage planetary gear set 136.

The second sun gear 148 provides driving torque to a plurality of planetary gears 150 which are each in meshing engagement with a second stage ring gear 152. A second stage planetary carrier 154 supports the plurality of second stage planetary gears 150 and provides driving torque to a third sun gear 156 of the third stage planetary gear set 138.

The third stage sun gear 156 is in meshing engagement with a plurality of planetary gears 158 of the third stage planetary gear set 138. The third stage planetary gears 158 are in driving engagement with a third stage ring gear 160 which is fixed to housing 130. A third stage planetary carrier 162 supports the third stage planetary gears 158 and provides driving torque to the rotatable drum 16. The first stage ring gear 144 and the third stage ring gear 160 are each fixed non-rotationally relative to the housing 130.

The second stage ring gear 152 is operable in a first mode wherein the ring gear 152 is non-rotationally fixed within the housing 130 for normal driving operation of the drum 16. In a second operating mode, the second stage ring gear 152 is free to rotate relative to the housing 130 so that the gear reduction unit is in a free spool mode that allows the drum 16 to spool-out and rotate without being driven by the motor.

As illustrated in FIG. 5, a pivoting pawl 166 is provided with a pivot pin 168 so that the pivoting pawl 166 is able to engage and disengage the second stage ring gear 152. The pivoting pawl 166 is driven by the electromagnetic solenoid actuator 36 that includes a plunger 172 that is connected to a second end of the pawl 166 and is biased by a spring 174 toward a normally engaged position of the pawl 166.

The electromagnetic solenoid actuator 36 is a dual coil actuator including an outer pulldown coil 176 and an inner hold coil 178 that are each concentric with the plunger 172. During operation, the pulldown coil 176 and hold coil 178 are both actuated to draw the plunger 172 to a disengaged position for disengaging the pawl 166 from the second stage ring gear 152. Once the plunger 172 is moved to the disengaged position, the pulldown coil 176 is no longer necessary to hold the plunger 172 in the disengaged position while the hold coil 178 is sufficient to hold the plunger 172 in the disengaged position. It is noted that the pulldown coil 176 is a relatively high power coil that can be actuated for a period of approximately 5 to 10 seconds in order to actuate the plunger 172 from the engaged to the disengaged position. The hold coil 178 is a relatively lower power coil than the pulldown coil 176 and can be maintained in an actuated state to allow free spooling from the rotatable drum 16 for an extended period of time.

With reference to FIG. 5A, a detailed view of the plunger 172 is shown including a cylindrical outer wall and stepped feature including a flat portion 172a which provide a high holding force when the gap is very small. This is useful in the hold mode when only the hold coil 178 is used. A cone portion 172b provides a high hold force when the gap is large. This is useful in maximizing the force of the solenoid 36 when both coils 176, 178 are energized during the pull down mode where the gap is large.

6

With reference to FIG. 6, the second stage ring gear 152 is shown including a plurality of ring gear clutch dogs 180 on the outer circumference of the ring gear 152 and including ring gear spaces 182 disposed between the ring gear clutch dogs 180.

As illustrated in FIG. 6 the pawl 166 includes a head 184 that engages a pawl stop 186 provided on the housing 130. The pawl head 184 and pawl stop 186 each have slightly angled opposing faces which impart a radially inward force component on the pawl 166 which tends to hold the pawl 166 in the engaged position. A high load on the winch 10 causes a high radial force tending to firmly hold the pawl 166 into the engaged position. In this condition, the solenoid actuator 36 has insufficient force to overcome the radial load, and the winch 10 will be prevented from shifting to the free spool mode while a load is being applied to the drum 16. In this way, high loads are prevented from being released either purposely or accidentally. If the winch load is low, the gap between the pawl head 184 and the pawl stop 186 is open. The opposing faces between the pawl head 184 and the second ring gear dog clutch 180 is straight and therefore provides very little resistance to the sliding motion. Therefore, in this condition, the force required to shift the pawl 166 to free-spool mode is low. Therefore, the force required of the solenoid actuator 36 is also low. This allows the size and cost of the solenoid 36 to be kept low. The pawl 166, the pawl stop 186, and the second ring gear 152 are each made of hardened steel to prevent wear of the mating parts during dynamic shifting between the engaged and free-spool modes.

With reference to FIGS. 7 and 8, the plunger 172 of the solenoid actuator 36 is shown connected to the end of the pawl 166. The plunger 172 is oriented in a downwardly angled position so that gravity biases the plunger 172 toward the normally engaged position along with the spring 174. The pawl 166 is pivotally supported by the pivot pin 168 which is received in a pair of recessed slots 190 within the housing 130. A spring member including two spring fingers 192a, 192b are provided for holding each end of the pivot pin 168 within the slots 190. When the winch 10 is in the engaged mode and the clutch dog 180 is acting against the pawl head 184, the pawl head 184 is forced to move laterally. This force is reacted by the pawl pin 168. However, the pivot pin 168 which is held in the pockets 190 in the housing 130 by the finger springs 192a, 192b deflect under a certain load. When the finger springs 192a, 192b deflect, the pivot pin 168 can rock, and one end of the pin 168 will climb out of the pocket 190 against the force of the fingers springs 192a, 192b. This allows the pawl head 184 to move laterally against the pawl stop 186 wherein a high load on the winch 10 causes a high radial force between the pawl head 184 and pawl stop 186 to firmly hold the pawl 166 into its engaged position, as discussed in detail above.

With reference to FIG. 8, the solenoid actuator 36 is provided with a limit switch 196 that is in communication with the microcontroller unit 66 of the winch control module 30. The microcontroller unit 66 controls actuation of the motor 12 and the electromagnetic clutch actuator solenoid 36. When the limit switch 196 is engaged by the limit switch tripper 198 the limit switch 196 provides a signal to the microcontroller unit 66 to indicate that the clutch actuator 36 is in the free spool mode. The microcontroller unit 66 can transmit this information via wired or wireless communication to the remote control unit 40 that can include an indicator such as a colored or blinking light or other display such as LCD screen 54 to indicate to the user that the winch 10 is in the free spool mode.

It is further noted that the microcontroller unit 66 can provide control signals for disengaging the solenoid actuator 36 to allow the clutch to be reengaged. This can occur via a timed sequence wherein the microcontroller unit 66 only allows the clutch actuator 36 to remain in the disengaged position for a predetermined amount of time and then automatically deactivates the clutch actuator 36 to allow the clutch to be reengaged. Furthermore, when the remote control unit 40 is operated in either a spool-in or spool-out direction, indicating that the user desires to operate the winch, the microcontroller unit 66 can deactivate the clutch actuator 36 to allow the clutch to be re-engaged when the operator initiates a spool-in or a spool-out operation.

The foregoing description of the embodiments has been provided for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the disclosure. Individual elements or features of a particular embodiment are generally not limited to that particular embodiment, but, where applicable, are interchangeable and can be used in a selected embodiment, even if not specifically shown or described. The same may also be varied in many ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the disclosure, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A winch, comprising:
  - a rotatable drum; and
  - a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to said rotatable drum, said gear train including a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow said rotatable drum to free spool, and a clutch actuator for disengaging said clutch, said clutch including a pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and said clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of said pivoting pawl, where the pivoting pawl, from the first end to the second end, is arranged parallel to a drive shaft of the gear train.
2. The winch according to claim 1, wherein said electro-magnetic solenoid includes a spring that biases the plunger toward a direction that engages said pivoting pawl with said clutch dog and wherein the drum is disposed between the gear train and the motor.
3. The winch according to claim 1, wherein when the electro-magnetic solenoid is energized, the plunger is moved to a retracted position which causes the pivoting pawl to pivot about a pivot pin to disengage the first end from the clutch dog, the pivot pin arranged at a midsection of the pivoting pawl.
4. The winch according to claim 1, wherein said electro-magnetic solenoid includes a first coil and a second coil, each of the first coil and the second coil concentric with the plunger, said first coil being operated along with said second coil to retract the plunger and said plunger being held in a retracted position by only said first coil.
5. The winch according to claim 4, wherein said second coil provides a higher force than said first coil and wherein the first coil is maintained in an actuated state for an extended period of time relative to the second coil.
6. The winch according to claim 5, further comprising a winch controller that controls operation of said electro-magnetic solenoid and that limits a maximum on-time for each of the first and second coils.
7. The winch according to claim 1, further comprising a limit switch provided on the electro-magnetic solenoid that is tripped by one of said plunger and said pivoting pawl when the plunger and pivoting pawl are in a disengaged position,

said limit switch being in communication with a controller to indicate that the clutch is in a disengaged position to allow the rotatable drum to free spool.

8. The winch according to claim 1, wherein the gear train includes a housing mounted to a drum support of the drum and wherein said pivoting pawl includes a pawl head at the first end with an angled face, said pivoting pawl is pivoted about a pivot pin, the pivot pin arranged perpendicular to the drive shaft of the gear train and a direction a movement of the plunger, the pivot pin held in a pair of pockets in the housing by a spring member that deflects when said rotatable drum is under load and the pivoting pawl is engaged with said clutch dog, allowing the pivoting pawl to move laterally in a direction parallel to the pivot pin and perpendicular to the drive shaft.

9. The winch according to claim 8, wherein a pawl stop is provided on the housing and positioned with a small gap to the pawl head, wherein when said pawl head moves laterally against the spring member, the gap is closed and the pawl head rests against the pawl stop, said pawl stop and said pawl head have angled opposing faces which impact a radial force on the pivoting pawl to hold it in an engaged position.

10. The winch according to claim 1, wherein the gear train includes a housing mounted to a drum support of the drum, wherein the electro-magnetic solenoid is arranged within and at an end of the housing, away from the drum support, and wherein said pivoting pawl is pivoted about a midsection thereof and wherein said plunger is oriented in a downward direction so that gravity biases the plunger toward a normally engaged position of the pivoting pawl and wherein when the plunger moves downward, the first end of the pivoting pawl moves upward to engage the clutch dog.

11. The winch according to claim 1, wherein one end of the plunger engages the second end of the pivoting pawl and wherein another end of the plunger, opposite the one end engaged with the pivoting pawl, includes a cylindrical outer wall and a stepped feature including a generally flat face portion and a cone shaped portion extending from the generally flat face portion.

12. A clutch control system for a winch, comprising:

- a rotatable drum rotatably supported by a first drum support and a second drum support;
- a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to said rotatable drum, the drum disposed between the gear train and the motor, where a housing of the gear train is mounted to the second drum support, said gear train including a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow said rotatable drum to free spool, and a clutch actuator for disengaging said clutch, the gear train and clutch actuator disposed within the housing, the clutch actuator further disposed at an end of the housing outboard of the gear train, where an axis of a drive shaft of the gear train intersects the clutch actuator; and
- a remote control device including a winch power-in button, a winch power-out button and a free-spool button, the free-spool button activates the clutch actuator to shift the gear train to free-spool mode when the free-spool button is pressed on the remote control device, wherein the gear train automatically shifts into normal operation mode when either of the winch power-in or power-out buttons are pressed.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the clutch includes a pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and the clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of the pivoting pawl.

9

14. A winch, comprising:

a rotatable drum; and

a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to said rotatable drum, said gear train including a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow said rotatable drum to free spool, and a clutch actuator for disengaging said clutch, said clutch including a pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and said clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of said pivoting pawl, where downward movement of the plunger causes the pivoting pawl to pivot upward and into engagement with the planetary ring gear of the gear train, said electro-magnetic solenoid includes an outer, first coil and an inner, second coil, said first coil being operated along with said second coil to retract the plunger and said plunger being held in a retracted position by only said first coil, each of the first coil and the second coil concentric with the plunger.

15. The winch according to claim 14, wherein said second coil provides a higher force than said first coil and wherein the second coil is actuated for a first period of time and the first coil is actuated for the first period of time and an extended, second period of time.

16. The winch according to claim 15, further comprising: a remote control device including a winch power-in button, a winch power-out button and a free-spool button, the free-spool button activates the clutch actuator to shift the gear train to free-spool mode when the free-spool button is pressed on the remote control device; and

a winch controller that controls operation of said electro-magnetic solenoid and that limits a maximum on-time for each of the first and second coils and wherein each of the winch power-in and power-out buttons activate the clutch actuator to shift the gear train out of free-spool mode when one of the winch power-in and power-out buttons is pressed on the remote control device.

17. The winch according to claim 14, wherein said plunger includes a cylindrical outer wall and a stepped feature including a generally flat face portion and a cone shaped portion extending from the generally flat face portion at an end of the plunger opposite another end of the plunger engaging the second end of the pivoting pawl.

18. A clutch control system for a winch, comprising:

a rotatable drum;

a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to said rotatable drum, said gear train including a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow said rotatable drum to free spool, and a clutch actuator for disengaging said clutch; a remote control device including a winch power-in button, a winch power-out button and a free-spool button, the free-spool button activates the clutch actuator to shift the gear train to free-spool mode when the free-spool button is pressed on the remote control device; and

a limit switch disposed adjacent to the clutch actuator and the clutch, the limit switch and clutch actuator disposed within an end cover of a housing of the gear train, the limit switch tripped by said clutch when the clutch is in a disengaged position, said limit switch being in com-

10

munication with a controller to indicate that the clutch is in the disengaged position to allow the rotatable drum to free spool.

19. The clutch control system according to claim 18, wherein said controller provides a signal to the remote control device that the gear train is in free spool mode when the limit switch is tripped by the clutch and said remote control device includes an indicator to indicate to a user that the gear train is in free spool mode, wherein the indicator includes a light.

20. A winch, comprising:

a rotatable drum; and

a gear train drivingly connecting a motor to said rotatable drum, said gear train including a clutch that is operable to be disengaged to allow said rotatable drum to free spool, and a clutch actuator for disengaging said clutch, said clutch including a pivoting pawl adapted to move radially and laterally relative to a drive shaft of the gear train, the pivoting pawl having a first end that engages a clutch dog of a planetary ring gear and said clutch actuator includes an electro-magnetic solenoid having a plunger that engages a second end of said pivoting pawl, said pivoting pawl is pivoted about a pivot pin, the pivot pin arranged perpendicular to the drive shaft and a direction a movement of the plunger, that is held in a pair of pockets by a spring member that deflects when said rotatable drum is under load and the pivoting pawl is engaged with said clutch dog, allowing the pivoting pawl to move laterally in a direction parallel to the pivot pin when a predetermined load is applied to the rotatable drum.

21. A method for a winch, comprising:

via a controller of the winch:

receiving a first signal from a remote controller to disengage a clutch of a gear train of the winch and shift the winch into a free spool mode where a drum of the winch is allowed to free spool, the clutch including a pivoting pawl pivotable radially relative to a drive shaft of the gear train;

actuating both an outer, first coil and an inner, second coil of an electro-magnetic solenoid clutch actuator of the winch to draw a plunger of the electro-magnetic solenoid clutch actuator to a retracted, disengaged position and subsequently pivot the pivoting pawl coupled to an end of the plunger radially outward and out of engagement with a ring gear of the gear train; and

once the plunger is moved into the disengaged position, only actuating the first coil to hold the plunger in the disengaged position.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising receiving a second signal from the remote controller to engage the clutch and, in response, deactivating the electro-magnetic solenoid clutch actuator, pivoting the pivoting pawl to move the pivoting pawl radially inward and into engagement with the ring gear, and moving a pawl head of the pivoting pawl laterally, in a direction parallel to a pivot pin of the pivoting pawl, against a pawl stop arranged on a housing of the gear train.

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